

Homily for the Seventh Sunday of Easter

(Scriptures for today's liturgy)

The closer we come to even the thought of losing someone we love, the more tightly we hold that person in our arms and hearts and more earnestly hope and pray the loss will never come...

You see this in the way any of will so carefully hold a newborn child in our arms...

You see it in the eyes of moms and dads watching sons and daughters leave for the first day of school...

We know it when someone we love is deployed, in our nation's service, to a faraway land and the work of war...

High school seniors feel this when the joy of graduation threatens friendships they once thought would last "forever..."

When a change in jobs or a transfer uproot a family or friend from the neighborhood or parish, the last days in town are filled with hugs that last longer than usual, and a wistful, "See ya later..."

At the bedside of a loved one who's ready to go home to God, we hold a hand, stroke a face, our fingers combing through hair as if the maintained touch might stave off the moment of leaving...

Moments of separation are softened with our farewell words:
*"I love you... I'll miss you... I'm still with you... Stay in touch...
Don't forget me... We'll always be friends... I'm still here for you...
This won't change things... Don't be a stranger...
We'll get together soon... I'll always remember you...
Hope to see you again, soon..."*

If any of those images and words have a place in your heart then you have a good understanding of today's gospel. Jesus' words here are part of his "Farewell Discourse," spoken on the night before he died at the last supper. He was leaving his closest friends and it wasn't easy.

What Jesus said to them that night, he says to all of us today. His words are filled with intimacy and longing:
*I am in you, Father, and you are in me
and I pray that all of these will be in us
and that you will love them as you love me.
I'm leaving them, Father,
but I will come back to take them with me*

*because I want them to be where I am
for they are your gift to me
and I pray they will remain in our love.*

It's not easy for any of us to say goodbye to those we love,
to let them go,
and it wasn't easy for Jesus either.

In spite of the intensity of our shared farewells
when we separate from those we love
we sometimes lose touch with them.

And it can be like that with the Lord and us, too.

We sometimes lose touch with him, even if, in the past,
there were times when we were very close to him.

Sometimes it's as though we've "moved away" from the Lord -
but he never moves away from us.

Sometimes we lose touch with the Lord
because we know how much he wants to be part of our lives
and we can be afraid or put off by what he asks of us
and fail to welcome the closeness he invites and offers.

And sometimes we lose touch with the Lord
just because we're lazy, selfish, too busy or careless.

But the good news is this:
what Jesus prayed for the apostles at the last supper
is what he prays for each of us, every day of our lives:
He never wants to lose touch with us
and he's always ready to renew our friendship with him.

And there's no moment when that's clearer
than when we're gathered at this table,
to remember his last supper with his friends.

At supper with his friends,
he prayed that we might be in him and he in us
and he fulfills that prayer as we receive him into our bodies and souls
in the Bread and Cup of this sacrament.

Jesus wants never to be separated from us or to lose any one of us.
His last prayer at table, his farewell pledge,
was to be with us always and never to abandon us.

May the Lord who found it hard to leave his friends

on the night before he died,
welcome us, his friends, as we receive the love he offers us
in the Holy Communion of this table.

- *Rev. Austin H. Fleming*